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SUBJECT: THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS ONE YEAR LATER

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Classified By: CDA David Hale for reason 1.5 (d)

11. (C) SUMMARY: The National Center for Human Rights (NCHR) has begun to improve Jordan's domestic human rights situation through education and influencing the GOJ's decision last year to admit several hundred refugees from Iraq. Despite centralized decision-making that has led to some internal personality clashes and a still evolving role, the Center has proved an effective partner in USG efforts to promote human rights in Jordan. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) As it nears one full year in operation, the NCHR has had a small, but noticeable positive impact on human rights in Jordan. Best known thus far for its domestic educational programs with government employees, parliamentarians, and students, the NCHR also claims some credit for the GOJ decision to admit 386 Iraqi Palestinians into Jordan from the UNHCR refugee camp at Ruweished. In fact, when asked, Center staff list this as their greatest accomplishment last year, though other sources, while corroborating NCHR involvement, point out that many other parties were involved in influencing this GOJ action. Staff have said privately that the greatest number of complaints brought to their attention thus far relate to Jordanian citizenship claim issues. They also admit that few cases have been resolved, largely because NCHR's ability to advocate in individual cases is legally and bureaucratically limited.

13. (SBU) The Center continues to search for new foci for its efforts and, given its limited budget, staff pitch "niche projects" to potential international donors, hoping to expand the Center's reach. After a few months of operation, the NCHR had recommended amendments to the law defining its functions. Still under discussion at the Prime Ministry, these changes include more independence through limited immunity for its employees, and legal authority to initiate and pursue court cases on behalf of individuals. In a lengthy newspaper interview published on May 3, Ahmad Obeidat, Chairman of the Board of Trustees, announced that the NCHR would issue quarterly reports on prisoners and prison conditions in Jordan, with the first one due for release soon.

14. (C) Though it has a Commissioner General and Executive Director, the NCHR is dominated by Obeidat, and several individuals have complained about his virtually dictatorial management style. Board member Nancy Bakir told Poloff that Obeidat makes all policy decisions, with only day-to-day business left to the Board (Note: with the full-time staff presumably having even less authority). While some praise Obeidat's ability to get things done, especially given his contacts as former prime minister and head of the General Intelligence Directorate, most feel that the NCHR is too much under his thumb. According to Bakir, personality conflicts with Obeidat were the reason behind the recent resignation of a board member. Rumors also persist that Commissioner General Walid Sadi is unhappy with his lack of independence and is waiting only for a better job offer before he resigns. A human rights consultant with decades of experience at Amnesty International who met with the NCHR last week pointed out the lack of any real strategic planning, which she attributed largely to staff hesitancy to act without "His Excellency's" (Obeidat's) blessing. At the same time, she was impressed with the diligence and sincerity of the staff and marveled at the welcome and access she received.

15. (C) COMMENT: In fact, the Center's centralized decision-making is no different than that found in other Jordanian bodies (even NGOs) and it has so far not hindered post's ability to work with the Center on a number of fronts, including organizing the human rights consultant's recent visit. The Center has sought out our input and assistance and we plan to continue our cooperation.

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